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Future business administrators examine sustainable practices

Science majors are not the only students discussing ecosystems in the classroom at St. Norbert College.

During the spring semester, **Jason Senjem** (Business Administration) offered a special topics class on sustainable enterprise. The course required students to research entrepreneurial ventures that promoted the protection of the environment. Students wrote papers on topics ranging from wind energy to green building and presented their findings in a poster display at the Todd Wehr Library.

"The class involved looking at how to meet the needs of today without compromising the needs of the future," said **Steven Hurley '08**. "I think it is the civic responsibility of businesses to protect the environment, otherwise they are not setting up future generations for an equal opportunity."

Hurley researched green architecture for his project, including the work of world-renowned architect William McDonough. Nike and Gap are among businesses utilizing environmentally friendly building materials and designs. One drawback, according to Hurley, is the initial cost.

"It may require a business to let go of the bottom line to do what is right, so you can do business tomorrow," he said. "It is extremely costly, but the costs are going to be offset later. A green structure is going to use less energy and be more efficient. The government is mainly heading up the green architecture movement, so businesses will probably receive some tax benefits."

Evelyn Silva '08 learned something about her hometown through her research. "I love being downtown in Chicago," she said, "but I didn't know that City Hall has a green roof system. They actually call it a rooftop garden."

The City Hall green roof project features more than 20,000 plants. Only one to five inches of soil are needed to create the garden. Silva explained that a soil irrigation system was installed to absorb stormwater.

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"It also elongates the life of the roof," she said. "The roof doesn't crack as much from the cold."

Another prominent Chicago location may soon undertake a green roof project, she added. "It's being considered at O'Hare," said Silva. "It would not only improve air quality but help with the reduction of sound reflections off the roof."

Renee Delsart '09 researched a loan program that assists the poor in India and Bangladesh. Microcredit provides small loans to families to help them purchase solar panels or biogas digesters as sources of sustainable energy.

Engineers from Grameen Shakti, a leading renewable energy company, go out to rural areas to assist the people, who otherwise would not have the resources to undertake such projects.

Microcredit is found mainly in developing nations, Delsart explained. Reasonable loans with 6 to 8 percent interest rates are made available to people with no credit history. Microcredit initiatives have been very successful—the repayment rate on such loans is 99 percent.

The students said the course showed them how businesses can take a problem and turn it into an opportunity.

"These are real environmental issues that are happening today," said Hurley. "Somebody needs to take the initiative to make changes."

